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## Synopses of Important Articles.

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DOES A LITERAL INTERPRETATION OF THE SONG OF SONGS REMOVE ITS CHARACTER AS SCRIPTURE? By PROFESSOR SAMUEL IVES CURTISS, D.D., in *The Bibliotheca Sacra*, January, 1898, pp. 53-91.

This question is asked because modern critics insist on a literal interpretation of this exquisite poem. While many saintly characters have adopted its glowing language to express their devotion and love to Christ, the ordinary reader is puzzled, in fact, finds no aid to devotion in the book. But must every book of the Bible subserve a devotional purpose? Is this fact to be a standard of canonicity? Paul evidently had no such standard in 2 Tim. 3:16, 17. What was the object of the writer of this book? Upon the answer to this question hangs the interpretation which we shall adopt. Three prominent theories of interpretation have been in vogue: (1) The allegorical, dominant since its reception in the canon. "This interpretation has no connection with the text except in the conceit of the interpreter." "The Christian allegorical method maintains that the bridegroom is Christ, and the bride is the church." No rules can be established to regulate such an interpretation. Usually, some hint is given when an allegory is intended (*cf.* Hosea 1:2—3; Ezek. 23:4; 16). (2) The typical—the modern orthodox interpretation. Typical interpreters find in the tender language of Solomon, the hero of the poem, and of Shulamith, its heroine, a type of Christ's love for the church, and of her communion with him. This is merely a theory, which can be applied to this book only by way of accommodation. To subject the entire book to such an interpretation would strand the interpreter long before he could reach the last chapter. (3) The third theory is that the book is just what it purports to be—a song of true love. It celebrates the victory of a simple Israelitish maiden over all the blandishments of Solomon, supported by all the arts of the women of his harem, who do all they can to arouse the lust of this pure maiden, whose heart is set on her shepherd lover who is ever present in thought. "The object of this poem is to glorify true love, the love of one man for one woman, to show that it is so holy

that no treasures on earth can buy it, not even a throne can tempt it." In form it is a drama, but not intended to be played. The divisions are not always clear, though, in the main, they can be perceived. The preferable date for the composition of this charming production is either during the life of Solomon or in the generation following his death. Its author was not Solomon, but some poet conversant with a maiden's heart, with nature in the field, and with the royal court.

"When we reflect upon the crimes and sorrows with which men and women have been visited because of the perversion of love, it certainly does not seem strange that there should be one book in the Old Testament which shows its true nature, teaching that all the real peace and happiness of those who submit to it is dependent upon mutual and worthy affection."

This is an eminently candid, sane, and level-headed treatment of this puzzling book. The author, treating it as a drama, gives us a translation, with a prose interpretation interspersed at intervals throughout the poem, emphasizing, as opportunity offers, the dominant teaching of the book. His view is substantially that of Ewald, Robertson Smith, Steckel, and most other literal interpreters.

PRICE.

LES PAROLES DE JÉSUS A CANA. Par M. BOURLIER. *Revue Biblique*, July, 1897, pp. 405-22.

Many attempts have been made to explain the words of Jesus to his mother at Cana. Typical renderings and interpretations of French exegetes are all unsatisfactory. The thought of Jesus is very simple. Mary has said to him: "They have not enough wine." Jesus answers: "Do not trouble me, my mother; the moment is not yet come." One is not compelled to think that Mary asked, even indirectly, a miracle. Jesus intends to perform a miracle and supply the wine; he will wait till the wine before supplied is completely exhausted, that the miracle may be more manifest and absolutely undeniable. This is the "hour" for which he waits. There is no solemn declaration of principles. Nor is there severity of any sort in his words, not even pretended reproach, in disclaiming action from any natural motive; this finds confirmation in Mary's words to the servants; Jesus' reply does not repulse her, but gives full assurance.

This interpretation is buttressed by an "analysis" of the Hebraisms of the text, the Latin translation for convenience being placed before the reader. 1. *Quid mihi et tibi est?* The literal translation in Latin or French does not give the sense. More energetic in the original,

like many French words once very expressive, but having now lost all their first force, it has become weakened. From "What have you to do with my affairs?" it has descended to "Don't trouble me," or "Let me alone." This loss of force is exhibited by citations from the Old Testament. It has not been duly considered by exegetes. 2. *Mulier*. The word "woman" as a vocative is used by biblical writers where we should say "madam" or "miss." In the gospels our Lord addresses various women thus. In the majority of passages it can be translated by "madam." Here it would be well rendered by "mother," "my mother," "dear mother," corresponding to modern usages which Jesus would adopt today. The genius of his national tongue would have forbidden any other form. 3. *Nondum venit hora mea*. *Hora* in such construction is illusive because of the difference of the genius of oriental and occidental languages. A comparison of Scripture texts has also favored this illusion; many passages in the New Testament, particularly the fourth gospel, use this phrase, and so many times is it connected historically with the last days of Jesus that exegetes have mistakenly given the sense of "final hour" to all analogous passages. It is absolutely certain that most of these texts do not refer to the final hour of Jesus, or anyone, but should be interpreted as referring simply to the moment for one to do something that concerns him. "My hour" of the episode at Cana signifies only the moment when Jesus will provide the necessary quantity of wine.

The *Revue Biblique* is a Roman Catholic publication, and this synopsis is offered, not because of any intrinsic merit in the article, but as perhaps fairly typical of the work of Romanist scholars along biblical lines. M. Bourlier evidently regards his essay as a distinct contribution for the better apprehension of Jesus' words, though it must be granted he offers it modestly and tentatively. He has doubtless examined only the work of French exegetes. He gives us practically nothing new; a "composite" from English and German writers—Alford, Dods, Maurice, Meyer, and others—would exhibit all the important points that M. Bourlier suggests.

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